



# Bringing home baby

Your guide to  
a healthy home





## Healthy living at home before and after your bundle of joy

When a new baby is about to arrive, parents get to work preparing a safe environment for their new addition. Avoiding certain chemicals, eating healthy, and exercising are vital during pregnancy.

This guide offers tips for creating a healthy environment for parents (or soon-to-be parents) and provides helpful information on how to have a safe and healthier pregnancy, baby, and home.

*“The scientific evidence over the last 15 years shows that exposure to toxic environmental agents before conception and during pregnancy can have significant and long-lasting effects on reproductive health.”*

—AMERICAN COLLEGE OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNECOLOGISTS

The umbilical cord is the lifeline between the mother and baby. However, studies show that the umbilical cord and placenta do not have the ability to protect the baby from harmful chemicals that the mother inhales, ingests, or absorbs through the skin.



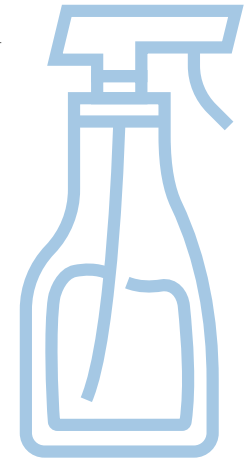
# Healthy living starts at home

## Improving our indoor air quality

Within the home, many environmental triggers can impact the quality of the air we breathe, including cleaning products, ventilation, moisture, tobacco smoke, radon, and other household products. Poor indoor air quality can be a trigger for respiratory conditions like asthma and allergies both in adults and children.

## Clean safely

For ***routine cleaning*** of hard/non-porous surfaces, select ***plant-based*** soaps/sprays rather than petroleum-based products. You can even make your own cleaning products by using household items such as vinegar and baking soda to remove dirt and germs. For ***disinfecting hard surfaces***, be sure to clean the surface first with a soap/detergent. Avoid bleach or chlorine based ready-to-use products and use ***hydrogen peroxide-based products*** for a safer alternative. Hydrogen peroxide (5-8%) or rubbing alcohol (at least 70%) can be used as a disinfectant and can be found in most stores.

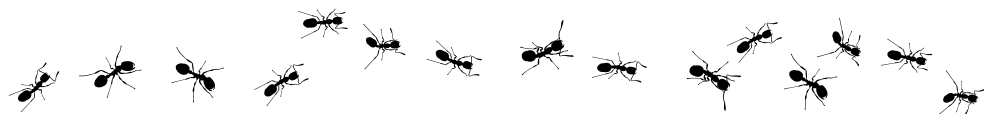


Do not smoke or vape, especially in the home, and be sure to minimize exposure to second-hand smoke.

When cooking, make sure to properly ventilate the kitchen with fans and open windows when the outdoor air is acceptable.

Make your own scent with fresh flowers, citrus peels or cloves. Seek candles made from beeswax or soy. Avoid paraffin candles and spray/aerosol or plug-in products that can emit harmful pollutants.





## Manage pests

Everyone has to deal with unwanted critters in their home. The droppings or body parts of cockroaches and other pests can trigger asthma and/or allergic reactions. There are safer and more effective ways to deal with pests than using chemicals. Insecticides and pesticides are not only toxic to pests — they can harm people, too.

Some pest management methods pose less of a risk:

- Keep counters, sinks, tables, and floors clean and free of clutter.
- Clean up dishes, crumbs, and spills right away.
- Store food in airtight containers.
- Seal cracks or openings around cabinets and the home's foundation.
- Use physical controls like sticky traps for insects and snap traps for rodents.

If after using all these methods, you may need to consider using a pesticide; choose products that limit hazards.

Here's a good online resource for pest management:  
[extension.psu.edu/ipm/resources/pestproblemsolver](http://extension.psu.edu/ipm/resources/pestproblemsolver)

## Maintenance makes a difference

***Keeping our home safe, intact, and maintained is crucial to limiting environmental exposures within our walls. Common exposures like chipping/peeling paint, rodents/pests, radon, and mold can be linked to serious health effects.***

## Be lead safe

If your home was built before 1978, it is highly likely that lead-based paint is present. ***Lead is a neurotoxin, meaning it impacts the brain and central nervous system.*** When paint chips, crumbles, or begins peeling, the resulting dust contains lead and poses a health risk. Homes painted with lead paint on the exterior may leach lead into the soil when the paint is disturbed. Vacant lots may contain lead in the soil, especially if lead-containing products or materials were used in the once-standing property.

***There is no safe level of lead in children. Even low levels of lead in blood affect IQ, the ability to pay attention, and academic achievement.***

If you live in a home that was built before 1978, keeping paint intact is crucial to minimizing exposure (especially around high-impact surface areas like windows and doors). Routine cleaning and wet dusting can also help minimize dust exposure.

## Renovations

If you are planning to do renovations in a home built before 1978, be sure to hire a RRP certified contractor who is qualified to minimize lead dust and properly clean after the renovation is complete. If you are planning to do your own renovation, make sure you are doing it in a lead safe way. Refer to [GetTheLeadOutPgb.org](http://GetTheLeadOutPgb.org) for more information on safely renovating your home.

## No more mold

Mold grows where there is moisture, such as around leaks in roofs, windows, or pipes; condensation (e.g., warm air on cold surfaces); or where there has been a flood. Mold grows on paper, cardboard, ceiling tiles, and wood. Mold can also grow in dust, paints, wallpaper, insulation, drywall, carpet, fabric, and upholstery.

### Prevent mold

#### Humidity

Keep humidity levels low. An air conditioner or dehumidifier will help.

#### Ventilation

Increase ventilation by opening doors and windows. Use fans and bathroom exhaust fans.

#### Limit carpet

Limit carpet use in bathrooms and other high-moisture areas.

#### Repair leaks

Repair leaks as soon as possible. Find the source of the problem first, fix it, and dry the area.

#### Cleaning mold

Clean mold with soap and water or 1 cup of bleach to 1 gallon of water.

## Invisible invader: radon

Radon is a gas that you cannot smell, taste, or see, and it forms naturally when uranium, radium, and thorium break down in rocks, soil, and groundwater. People can be exposed to radon primarily from breathing it in air that comes through cracks and gaps in buildings and homes. Inhaling radon can cause health problems, as radon is known to be the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States.

Test annually during the winter months, if the level reads above 4 pCi/l consider installing a radon reduction system in the basement.



## Personal Care Products

The products we use every day may contain chemicals that can be harmful to our health. There are three different classes of chemicals that can be particularly harmful: carcinogens (cancer causing chemicals), hormone disruptors (mimics or interferes with natural hormones), and allergens (causes an allergy).

## Flame retardants

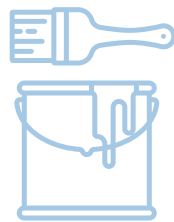
Flame retardants are chemicals that are applied to materials (like furniture and clothing) to prevent the start or slow the growth of fire. However, because they do not easily break down, they can remain in the environment for years and can also build up in people and animals over time. These chemicals can leak from products into dust and the air, and they are associated with negative health effects including: hormone and thyroid disruption, cancer, and adverse effects on fetal and child development.

When purchasing products for you and your baby, avoid flame retardants which can be commonly found in blankets, pajamas, carrier covers, and car seats.

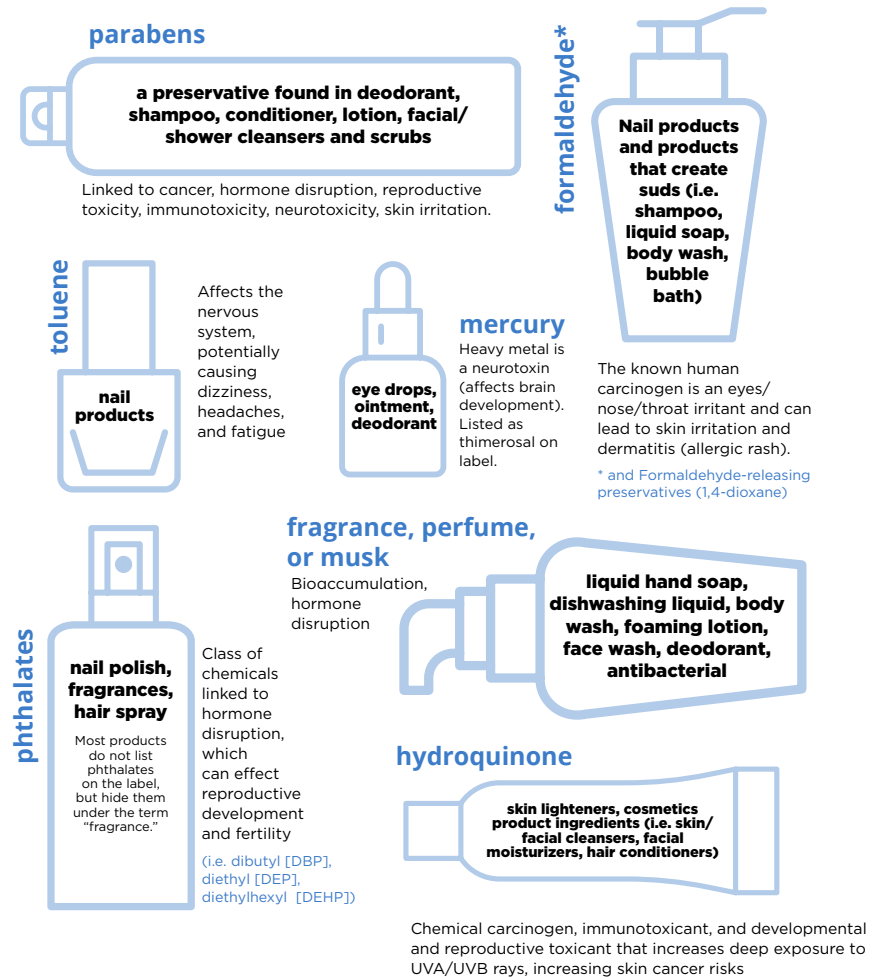
## No fuming

Also known as **volatile organic compounds (VOCs)**, toxic fumes are found in paint, stains, adhesives, carpet, cosmetics, cleaning fluids, and air fresheners. Parents usually decide to paint the nursery before the baby arrives and do not realize that these paints could release VOCs, which can be harmful to parent and children's health. Seek paints with low or no VOCs when renovating/remodeling/repainting.

Change your furnace/AC filter every three months and vacuum carpets regularly (with a HEPA vacuum).



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All non-mineral sunscreen chemicals absorbed into the body could be measured in blood after just a single use, and many sunscreen ingredients have been detected in breast milk and urine samples. Avoid sunscreens with oxybenzone and try to use mineral sunscreens made with zinc oxide and/or titanium dioxide.

# Shop smart

The more you understand the products you buy and bring into your home, the healthier your home will be.

## Baby Products

Many infant and child personal care product brands have natural lines, but buyers beware that these products may still contain toxic chemicals. Choose products that are plant-based and have the fewest and safest ingredients. Remember, don't expose your baby to products such as nail polish and makeup; they will have time for that as they get older.

## Formula

It is not always possible to breastfeed, or a mother may have to supplement with formula. The American Academy of Pediatrics currently recommends that you seek iron-fortified formula for all infants who are not breastfed, and use filtered water when preparing it. Make sure to use an NSF-certified filter to remove the lead from the tap water. If you cannot filter your water, be sure to always use cold tap water when preparing formula or cooking food.

## Flooring

Carpet is a breeding ground for bacteria and requires a lot of cleaning to maintain a safe space for your baby to play. A safer alternative is hard flooring and throw rugs that can be placed in the wash. Avoid hardwood finishes that contain formaldehyde and VOCs. Choose natural flooring such as bamboo, cork, linoleum, or tile and natural rugs like wool or cotton. Clean carpets with pure steam or use cleaning companies that offer a chemical-free service.

## Cribs, Bedding, and Blankets

Babies spend 50-60% of the day sleeping. Use blankets and sheets that are made from natural materials such as cotton, silk, bamboo, and hemp. Seek crib mattresses that are made from organic cotton or wool, a plastic cover made from a food-grade polyethylene, and a natural mattress cover. The crib, changing table, and other furniture should be made of natural woods and have natural finishes.



## Your guide to smart shopping

When selecting feeding items such as baby bottles and sippy cups, **choose products that are PVC, BPS, and BPA free.**

**Beware of toys that contain toxic plastic softeners (phthalates), PVC (#3 plastics), and fragrances.** When you're not quite sure, avoid soft plastics that have a strong plastic smell (think rubber ducky). Also, be cautious of imported or antique toys that may contain toxic lead paint.

When buying a toy, **look for items that are made from wood or cloth.** If a toy can be reused (like a dollhouse or play set), then purchase a higher quality item.

Labels that say "eco-friendly" and "natural" are marketing terms, not legal standards. When buying personal care products for your baby, **read the labels and avoid products that contain fragrance, parabens, phthalates, and triclosan.**

Concerned your child's toy may have lead in it? Contact us to conduct a **toy test.**

***Find more resources for a healthy home at:  
[WomenForAHealthyEnvironment.org](http://WomenForAHealthyEnvironment.org)***

## About Us

Women for a Healthy Environment (WHE) is a non-profit focused on how the built environment impacts public health. WHE educates individuals about environmental risks, provides action steps communities and individuals can take to mitigate those risks, and advocates for solutions that better protect the health of communities across southwestern PA. Through the Healthy Homes program, WHE provides tools and resources to create healthy spaces for families to live, learn, grow, and play.

### ***Contact Us***

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